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DISC OF THE DAY

Meï Teï Sho

Lo Ba
Yotanka/Fusion III

It has been tagged Afro-jungle jazz, but that is only half the story. Throw in some dub, rap and rough-edged soul and you're beginning to get the picture. French five-piece Meï Teï Sho crafts an invigorating soundclash. Led by the commanding, growelly-voiced Jean Gonzis (who sings in English, French and Wolof), the group travels through all the above-mentioned styles while remaining amazingly grounded. Mixing world politics with world beats, but never disintegrating into world beat, Meï Teï Sho creates a sophisticated, sensoral and provocatively raw listening experiencing. The kicker is that it remains utterly jazzy throughout. This album jumps out of the speakers – you know it's going to work live. So don't miss them tonight at 10 on the Stella Artois Groove stage (where they also played last night).

T'CHA DUNLEVY

TODAY'S FREE FESTIVAL SHOWS

THE GAZETTE
Champion et ses G-Strings give a free show tonight at 11.

11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.: La Petite école du jazz (Grande-Place, Complexe Desjardins) – Redesigned for the 20th edition, the kiddies' jazz school is in session.
4 p.m.: Montreal Musician and Musical Instrument Show (Grande-Place, Complexe Desjardins) – Drum circle.
5 p.m.: Sweet Dixie (CBC Television Stage) – Serenading the esplanade with Crescent City swing since 1983.
5 p.m.: Montreal Musician and Musical Instrument Show (Amphithéâtre, Complexe Desjardins) – Heartwood flutes.
5:30 p.m.: Lots-Québec parade (starts at Bell Samsung Stage) – The daily Brazilian fanfare shakes its maracas and wiggles its cartoon-like through the site.
6 p.m.: Montreal Musician and Musical Instrument Show (Cinquième Salle, Place des Arts) – Meet Oliver Jones. (Amphithéâtre, Complexe Desjardins) – Create your own music, Mac-with-Apple. (Grande-Place, Complexe Desjardins) – Learn the guitar in one hour with Reed Gilbert.
6:30 p.m.: Irenico Orkestro (Cornerfour General Motors) – Members of Montreal's Manouche branch out into klezmer and bossa.
7 p.m.: Lou Simon (Stella Artois Blues Stage) – Montreal piano woman went from Beethoven to boogie-woogie.
7 p.m.: Tep Hot Quartet (Club Jazz TD Canada Trust) – Marc Villeneuve goes gypsy.
7:30 p.m.: Said Mesnaoui & Transe Gnawa (Stella Artois Stage) – Moroccan hypno-music from the Gnawa brotherhood.
8 p.m.: François Richard Quartet (CBC Television Stage) – Virtuoso flutist played with Pastorius and Philippe Catherine.
8 p.m.: Kobayashi (Lots-Québec Stage) – Montreal dance music for rhythm brainiacs.
8 p.m.: Montreal Musician and Musical Instrument Show (Amphithéâtre, Complexe Desjardins) – Workshop with Robert Godin.
9 p.m.: Pat Metheny Group (General Motors Stage) – After a series of ticketed shows, the festival favourite takes it outside for a free finale.
9 p.m.: Jimmy Johnson (Stella Artois Blues Stage) – Former wielder is a blues powerhouse.
9 p.m.: Montreal Musician and Musical Instrument Show (Grande-Place, Complexe Desjardins) – Acoustic Guitar Jam, hosted by Paul Deslauriers.
10 p.m.: Kobayashi (Lots-Québec Stage) – See 8 p.m.
10 p.m.: Mei'ie She (Stella Artois Stage) – Lyon quintet drops franco-dub with a Japanese name, *o Wolof*.
10 p.m.: Tep Hot Quartet (Club Jazz TD Canada Trust) – See 7 p.m.
11 p.m.: Lou Simon (Stella Artois Blues Stage) – See 7 p.m.
11 p.m. Champion et ses G-Strings (Metropolis)
12:30 a.m.: Jimmy Johnson (Spectrum) – See 9 p.m.

The Montreal International Jazz Festival ends today. To see a schedule, go to the Web site, www.montrealjazzfest.com. For other information, call the Info-Jazz Bell Line (514) 671-1881 from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

ALLEN MCINNIS THE GAZETTE
Ranee Lee and Oliver Jones perform a brief duo at the Montreal International Jazz Festival yesterday.

JAZZ FESTIVAL NOTES

Consummate communicators

Metheny inspires

Paul Anka slick but over-the-top

Music lovers lucky enough to experience Pat Metheny's invitation series took part in a little slice of history that jazzbos will be talking about 50 years down the road.

Over the course of five indoor concerts, he played with a total of 15 musicians he admired. His eloquent presentation seemed entirely at their service, with the humility and pure joy of music that makes Metheny a hero for time-tested values in a world gone terribly wrong. Metheny's week won't ever be repeated, but it will remain a beacon of good vibrations.

"It's the first time I've been able to spend a day with him, and it was just so inspiring," said pollwinning drummer Matt Wilson, after Friday night's series finale. The long rehearsals squeezed between concerts were a joy. "He can play some pretty 'out' stuff, but the thing is, he's inclusive."

Metheny chose his material meticulously, honoring favourite composers (from Ornette Coleman to Antonio Carlos Jobim) covering an astonishing musical spectrum in perfectly paced programs, each conveying distinctive moods.

On opening night he loosened his fingers – literally shook them between numbers early on – with bassist Scott Colley and drummer Antonio Sanchez in his version of the art of the trio.

Then came Wednesday's four-hour marathon, with friends he's "admired from a distance for a long time." He explored classic melodic lyricism with trumpeter Enrico Rava, burned with tenor saxman David Sanchez, and chilled to jazz-funk with astonishing electric bassist Mi'shell Ndegeocello's band (In A Silent Way meets George Clinton). How cool was it? During one chill stretch, Metheny let loose a long solo perversely out of Nashville country!

There was the utterly peaceful, stately, placid Missouri Sky duet with bassist Charlie Haden (a fellow Missouri native), on the day of the London bombings.

Then two concerts Friday night: the tingling lightness of being in his reunion with vibraphonist Gary Burton (his "most important" mentor) and bassist Steve Swallow. Then it was up-close-and-very-personal at the Gesù with Dewey Redman, 74, whom he encountered 31 years ago when the tenor saxman played with Keith Jarrett's band. "From the moment I heard that sound of Dewey's it has been imbedded in me in a very deep place ... I think there's a unanimous feeling in the jazz world that he's possibly the most underrated musician of our time," Metheny said from the stage.

Referencing the 80/81 album they recorded 25 years ago, they started with the blues and ended with a hurricane of sound. In between was a gorgeous ballad, Beth, which he wrote for Redman to play in his deep Texas tone with cliff-hanging edges. Meanwhile drummer Wilson gleefully puttered about a Pandora's box of sounds punctuated by darting bass lines from John Menegon.

'Round about midnight Friday, he began his final set, a duet with electric guitar Mick Goodrick (with whom he started in Burton's quintet). Two distinctive voices intertwined, spinning stories (All the Things You Are segueing into Jobim's Insensatez).

When he wasn't soloing with those patented precise high notes, he was one of the most creative sympathetic and responsive sidemen around. Crouched over his guitar, his mop of hair acted as a kind of private curtain while his eyes concentrated on his fingers meeting strings.

He methodically laid the foundations for "the dream state" he was invited to create for his favourite festival (with Italy's Umbria Jazz). The summitry of inspiration, improvisation and technique. He is the consummate communicator, identifying and telling tales about each tune. He even squeezed in a 50-minute public chat with CBC Jazz Beat's Katie Malloch. (He divulged that he'd never force his two young sons into music but, yes, if they came to him, he'd love to teach them.)

He imbued the festival with a feverishly creative state of grace. There was something special about Metheny when he played Montreal 31 years ago with Burton at the In Concert Club. Something fresh, happy, eager-to-learn, wide-open, adventurous and, above all, in love with the music – in other words, nothing less than the artistic incarnation of the good stuff in life and sounds.

The 51-year-old man-child with the big smile has been a kind of modern-day shaman at this festival. Tonight's the climactic finale – a free outdoor show with his full touring group, in the final performance of his album-length tone poem The Way Up, that's "grown as we've grown into our parts."

Metheny is a man for all seasons, with musical news we can use. To think that his best work seems entirely in front of him puts a smile on your face, doncha think?

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

THURSDAY

GESÙ

German saxophonist Hans Ulrich was introducing two of legendary electric bassist Steve Swallow's tunes: "They're called Nuts and Soup. He always changes what they're called, so we start vid de fast one, yes?"

He looked over to black-clad Swallow, who mouthed the title.

"Soup, of course, then Nuts."

It was that kind of night – spiky, off-kilter and thoroughly charming – as the two teamed with drummer Jonas Johansen to become Tin Pan Aliens. Their idiosyncratic playfulness could belong in Jacques Tati's absurdist film M. Hulot's Holiday.

Ulrich is an appealingly strange player: quirky edge-less notes that have a hint of Sonny Rollins before evaporating quickly while Johansen had a peppery approach to a smallish drum kit (and snappy sandman brush technique).

As for Swallow, 64, he hunched over his five-string bass with a grimace and picked-out plush scooting lines (of note, a 12-minute romp based on Charlie Parker's Confirmation). Look behind, they're gaining on us!

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

HYATT REGENCY HOTEL

After her thunderous electric bass performance at Pat Metheny's four-hour marathon at the Spectrum ending at 2 a.m Thursday, Mi'shell Ndegeocello took over the Movado jam session at the Hyatt with trumpeter Terence Blanchard until 4:15 a.m. according to suave friend of the festival Alex Barta.

"No, it was 5:15," corrected hotel security chief, jazz fan and player Jimmy Faills.

Trumpeter Roy Hargrove jammed earlier in the week, as did pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba. After midnight, in sauntered Michael Jackson, the wickedly amusing Yorkshire transplant in Chicago, who shoots photos for Downbeat and other pubs.

In a flash, he offered a glass of Chardonnay to ruby-lipped April Ellington, the Duke's daughter and vocalist with the Savoy Ellingtons. "The book (a memoir) is coming," she promised.

The house trio, pianist Thuryn Von Pranke with Morgan Moore and Martin Auguste, was indefatigable as always. The insightful David Beckett, our man from Burlington's Discover Jazz Festival, was unusually quiet, still floored by how well Metheny fit with Ndegeocello's bold jazz-funk 24 hours earlier. "It was one of those 'Who knew?' moments."

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

FRIDAY

METROPOLIS

Daniel Lanois has become a Montreal and jazz fest regular over the past few years. But two back-to-back sold-out shows at Metropolis on Friday evening still provided some surprises.

Lanois's recent album Belladonna finds the artist exploring particularly mellow turf, and that was reflected as he took the stage at 9:30 for the late show.

Following familiar vocal numbers such as I Love You, Where Will I Be and the Messenger, Lanois indulged in the emotive sonic textures that are his trademark.

He prefaced a three-song instrumental stretch by advising people to chill out and trip out to the psychedelic sounds. When he sat to play his loyal pedal steel guitar, one's imagination could not help but float along with his impressionistic melodic wanderings.

The seated crowd paid him utmost attention, and was rewarded with captivating renditions of his classic odes Adie Louise and The Collection of Marie Claire. An evening of understatement, subtlety, and unhurried beauty.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

SPECTRUM

Call it the instant-convert factor: few people seem to emerge from their first Harry Manx set without wanting to make a beeline for the nearest record store to buy a Manx disc.

The guitarist's unusual approach to blues – blending slide guitar with raga spice, courtesy of the 30-string Mohan Veena and tabla player Neil Golden – fired up the Spectrum during the opening half of a bill shared with multi-instrumentalist Xavier Rudd.

Few people can get away with covering Van Morrison, but Manx's version of Crazy Love is so good that you can forget the Belfast Cowboy for a few minutes.

One-man band Rudd presided over a glorious revival of psychedelia, creating a hurricane of sound with his guitars, a didgeridoo, various percussion accessories and other instruments.

At the end of one number, some audience members refused to stop singing the wordless hook, leaving Rudd no choice but to return to the drum set and accompany them. From such unscripted moments come half-of-fame shows.

BERNARD PERUSSE

PLACE DES ARTS

The orchestra kicked into Diana, the audience howled with delight and Paul Anka entered Salle Wilfrid Pelletier from one of the side entrances and headed toward the stage, singing his first big hit and working the audience along the way. And in an ultra-slick, highly professional show that mixed career highlights with songs from his new album, Rock Swings, Anka proved himself to be the consummate Vegas-styled professional.

It's hard to think of a hit that was passed over or an earnest reminiscence that went unvoiced.

True, virtual duets with Sammy Davis Jr. and Frank Sinatra went way over the top, but Anka – in fine voice throughout the concert – delivered a real show and demonstrated why he's been in the business for 47 years.

BERNARD PERUSSE

HYATT REGENCY HOTEL

The Alex Bellegarde Quartet was awarded the Grand Prix de Jazz General Motors, generally considered a springboard for serious up-and-comers, while Sage Reynolds of the Sage Reynolds Quartet won the Prix Étoiles Galaxie for best new composition.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

TONIGHT

METROPOLIS

After overcoming the elements in grand style at the big outdoor show Tuesday night, Champion et ses G-Strings will play a festival-closing performance tonight at Metropolis. The band's utterly groovy mix of belt-em-out soul vocals, power-charged guitars (that can stretch from ambient to rock) and stomping house beats is the best party in town. The show is free, doors open at 10:30, start time is midnight. Passes (two per person) are available at the Info-Jazz Bell booths on the fest site.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

REVIEWS

Closing in style

Ranee Lee

Oliver Jones joins for final show

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

"I have a feeling there's not a soul out there I don't know," said hometown singer Ranee Lee of the jam-packed Théâtre Maisonneuve last night, at the jazz festival's official closing concert.

One those she knows best is local piano legend Oliver Jones, who was again coaxed out of retirement to join her in an evening celebrating her 25 years with Justin Time Records and the release of her duet album with Jones, titled Just You Just Me.

But first there were the requisite brassy warm-up tunes with a seven-piece band led by guitarist (and husband) Richard Ring. Dressed in a white pant suit and revealing an operatic decolité, she eased into Just One of Those Things.

She adapted Images, a Jones ballad in the Feelings vein, with lyrics that hit home in arguably the major local concert of her career; "mirrors from the past of things to come," that "takes us to a place we want to be." Her voice began to soar in a French song with a breezy bossa nova sound, giving pianist John Sadowy a chance to trip the light fantastic.

There was tribute to Miss Ella Fitzgerald, scatting loose and torrid on Lady Be Good to Me ("Je suis très fatigué," she confessed to laughter).

Lee introduced Jones as "fabulous, generous, a great wonderful talent, he's a dear friend." In turn, the 71-year-old local legend returned the compliment by tumbling into Sophisticated Lady, by Duke Ellington.

Jones is nothing if not emphatic, attacking the piano on Take the A Train, and his florid touch permeated such favourite ballads as Over the Rainbow.

Soon, they were singing Just You, Just Me, as her big Montreal family at Place des Arts soaked up the intimacy.

Big guns

John Mayall

Blues godfather brings secret weapon

BERNARD PERUSSE
THE GAZETTE

As a bandleader, John Mayall has always been courageous and generous enough to surround himself with top-notch talent. The latest secret weapon in Mayall's Bluesbreakers is Buddy Whittington, a Texas-born guitarslinger, who had jaws dropping every few seconds at last night's standing-room-only Spectrum show. With his endlessly inventive way of constructing eloquent, rapid-fire phrases – from whisper to scream and everything in between – Whittington avoids the cliché and almost always finds a fresh angle.

Mayall seemed to enjoy Whittington's playing as much as the audience, giving the guitarist the kind of facial encouragement a father gives a son who's about to score a goal – almost willing the victory with his expressions.

The godfather of British blues, who will be 72 in November, was a delight to watch from the moment he sprinted out on stage and did a little victory lap. Behind him, this lean, mean, musician-sounding version of the Bluesbreakers – Whittington, bassist Hank Van Sickle and drummer Sonny Cochran – slammed out the introduction to Road Dogs and proceeded, song by song, to make Montreal forget their legendary predecessors.

Playing harmonica, guitar and keyboards with the gusto of a man who loves the blues more than ever, Mayall blended new songs with classics like Have You Heard, All Your Love and Room To Move. The encore, J.B. Lenoir's Talk To Your Daughter, finally shut the door on a show that was as exciting and fish-free as any blues performance you'd care to remember.

bperusse@thegazette.canwest.com

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